DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 204 821 CS 503 526

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TITLE Group-Hate: A Negative Reaction to Group Work.
PUB DATE May 81
NOTE 27p.: Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the International Communication Association (Minneapolis, MN, May 21-25, 1981).

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC02 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Classification: Classroom Communication: College Students: *Group Dynamics: Groups: Higher Education: Interpersonal Competence: *Negative Attitudes: *Speech Communication: *Speech Instruction: *Student Attitudes: Teaching Methods

ABSTRACT

Despite the fact that group work in speech communication classes is assigned to aid students in learning to work productively in groups, there are many people who avoid it and who express a sincere dislike for any group activity in the academic setting. This negative initial reaction toward group work was studied in order to compile a taxonomy of attitudes toward group work as expressed by students in a basic speech course. At the beginning of the course, 208 students wrote brief papers concerning their attitudes toward group work. Information from the papers was categorized in terms of the student's overall reactions to group work, the types of groups the student had participated in, and the student's attitude toward those groups. The most common reasons given for disliking group work clustered around four areas: grades, interpersonal considerations, poor outcomes of group work, and group organization factors. At the end of the course, interviews were conducted with 44 of the students to determine if their attitudes had changed. Only two students reported an attitude change--both from negative to positive. The findings suggest that group problem solving methods and related methods of group management should be taught as a means of reducing students' negative initial reactions to group work. (FL)

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Group-hate

A Negative Reaction to Group Work

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CS503526

Group-hate
A Negative Reaction to Group Work*

Introduction

Group work is as commonplace to a basic speech communication course as term papers are to English classes and as lab experiments are to chemistry classes. At The Pennsylvania State University, the basic speech communication performance course is divided into four options--individual public speaking, group problem-solving, rhetorical criticism, and a special section for reticent speakers. Each of these options, however, teaches basic group problem-solving as a part of the core material. All of the options of this course are designed to take some of the problems out of problem-solving, so that the members of a group will not spend their time unnecessarily. (See: A Manual for Teachers, Speech Communication 200, 1978). Penn State, however, is not the only course to offer or require a basic public speaking course. According to McKinney (1980), 49 of 50 major universities offer a basic course in public speaking.

Despite the fact that group work in speech communication classes is assigned to aid students in learning to work productively in groups, there are many people who avoid group work, and express a sincere dislike for any group activity in the academic setting. This negative initial reaction toward group work, which I have called "group-hate" was the subject of a study undertaken at The Pennsylvania State University (Sorensen, 1980). The study compiled a taxonomy of attitudes expressed by students in a basic speech course toward group work. The reason for attempting to compile such information was to make possible recommendations for ways to teach group work, and to provide information about why students do not like group work.

(*excerpted from a Master's thesis by Susan M. Sorensen)

The Population

There are many types of students who do not like to work in groups. The ones of interest to this study, however, are those who do not have communication skills deficits as their basic reason for dislike of group work. That is, if a student is reticent, shy, or apprehensive about communication situations in general, then it might be best to focus on those skills first, before attempting to find out why the person does not like to work in a group. The person, though, who has no apparent communication difficulties, who in fact excels in many areas of discourse, yet maintains a negative reaction toward working in groups is the student in whom this study is interested.

At The Pennsylvania State University, a basic course in public speaking is required. The basic course, however, is separated into four options: Individual Public Speaking, Group Problem-Solving, Rhetorical Criticism, and a special section for Reticent Speakers. The first three courses can be registered for as a part of regular instruction, but the fourth course, the one for reticent speakers, is available by interview only. The reticent students must sign up for one of the first three options, and then, on the first day of class, any student who feels that s/he might benefit by a course designed specifically for those with communication skill difficulties (described as anxiety in a social conversation, difficulty speaking to authorities, etc.--see Appendix A) is asked to go for an interview with one of the instructors of the reticence sections. During the interview the student and the instructor discuss the nature of the course, and whether or not that student could achieve his/her speaking

goals through participation in such a course.

Due to their unique status within the instruction of the basic public speaking course, the reticent students were not included in this study. This is not to say, however, that these students have attitudes toward group work which are different from other students'. Because they have other communication skills problems, however, they may see their attitudes toward group work as secondary to their attitudes about communication in general. My assumption was that these students would be more likely to report difficulties in groups, not necessarily due to their initial dislike of group work, but because of their often negative reactions to any new communication situation.

In a study by Kelly (1980) reticent students were shown to have a dislike of group work, apart from their other communication problems. She shows that many of the reticent students in the special sections of public speaking at The Pennsylvania State University say that their interactions in groups are difficult and unproductive.

Another study of reticent students (McKinney, 1980) shows that many students who were enrolled in the group problem-solving sections of public speaking were reticent. This study, however, did not attempt to discover the attitudes of the students in the group option, and as such I did not separate out the group problem-solving options from the general population of the study. Because the students were not enrolled in the sections especially for reticent speakers, I could not generalize about their communication skills (or lack thereof). As a result, students from both the public speaking and group problem-solving sections were considered for my study. (At the time of this study, there were no students enrolled in the option for rhetorical criticism.)

Basic Te[illegible] f Group Work

As a background for this experiment, I attempted to discover what speech professionals said about the problem of the negative initial reaction to group work. The information gleaned from several introductory texts on group work is described below.

Though many introductory texts (See Brilhart, 1974; Patton and Giffin, 1973, Phillips, Pedersen and Wood, 1979) describe the feelings that students have toward groups, these descriptions are based on reports after the group is in process. Topics such as "hostility toward the group," or "hostile group members" are among the strongest attitudes expressed in dislike of the group experience. Given, however, the student who has not yet been assigned to a group or a group task, there is little discussion of what s/he can do to change an initial negative reaction. Doolittle, (1977) in a survey of basic speech communication textbooks, notes that there are three basic ideas of conflict, but again the reader is not helped if s/he has a reaction to the group before the conflict begins.

Various solutions are given in these basic texts concerning the group member who wishes to improve group interaction. S/he may be asked to follow some type of agenda so that the task might be completed quickly and competently, or perhaps the student can distribute leadership so that one person does not dominate the group, or the student may be shown some type of role to assume that would aid the group process (e.g., climate-maker, tension-reliever, etc.). These solutions can be, and are in fact, useful for the group which is attempting to solve a specific problem. The solutions, however, are inappropriate if the student is not involved in a particular group, but only anticipates

difficulty in a group which is not yet formed. My examination of the available materials did not lead to any discoveries about the student who has this initial negative reaction. It was at this point that I conducted the study which is outlined below.

Methodology

Two basic steps were followed during this study. First, students from ten sections of Speech Communication 200 (total N of students=208) were asked to write brief papers about their attitudes toward group work. These papers were analyzed to discover what types of groups the students belonged to, and what their attitudes were toward these groups. The second step was to randomly select students from these classes, after they had worked in groups in their classes, and to interview them about their attitudes before and after instruction in how to work in a group (total N of students interviewed=44).

Student's Papers. In order to assemble a taxonomy of attitudes toward group work, I asked students to write a two or three page paper about "Why you like or dislike working in groups." These papers were not graded, and the rationale given the students was to prepare them for their upcoming group work. The major advantage to this method of gathering data was the large amount of date I was able to collect, while using a relatively small amount of the students' time. Most of the students were quite thorough in their treatment of the topic, yet because the papers were short, they did not waste too much space telling about the glories or woes of particular group experiences. The information I took from each paper was (1) the type of group discussed, and (2) the reason for like or dislike of that group.

The method I followed to analyze the papers took three steps. First I read the paper to see if the student had made any global statement about his/her feelings toward group work. Only the most overt statements, such as "I really enjoy working in groups" or "I've never enjoyed working in groups" were recorded in the category of "Overall Reaction to Group Work." Though it might have been possible to "read into" the students' statements about group work, and designate a positive or negative reaction toward group work, I did not do so. Because I did not attempt to interpret the students' writings to obtain an overall reaction to group work, many fall into the category of "Unable to Determine" an overall reaction.

Once the overall reaction to group work was recorded, I went back through the paper to discover the types of groups the student had mentioned. The types of groups were designated as follows:

1. Task (classroom) - any group which performed a task within the confines of the classroom--graded or ungraded.
2. Task (other) - any group which produces tangible evidence of its existence--the group's primary purpose is to produce this product (most employment groups).
3. Interest - any group organized primarily around the common interests of its members (clubs, etc.).
4. Ascribed - any group to which a person must belong (such as family, race, etc.)
5. Therapy - any group designed primarily to solve the psychological problems of its members.
6. Other - student referred to a "group" but gave no other indication about the function of the group.

The frequency analysis for the number of times students recorded participating in these types of groups is discussed later in this paper (see Findings).

The final step in analyzing the papers was to distill the attitudes students held toward these groups. There were, naturally, many different types of attitudes toward groups, and I did not limit my analysis simply to the reasons students gave for disliking groups, but also for liking groups. Once the data was obtained, however, the reasons students gave for disliking groups tended to cluster around four major areas. These reasons were as follows:

1. Grades--Many students referred to the effect that group work has on their grades as a reason for disliking group work.

2. Interpersonal Considerations--This category encompassed objections to groups based on the many interpersonal conflicts and problems that group members find unpleasant when they participate in groups.

3. Outcome--Often group members pointed out that the outcome from their group efforts was not as "good" as the outcome which might have been achieved through individual effort.

4. Group Organization--This category encompassed the elements of "groupness" (e.g., size of group, group membership), over which participants have no control.

I did not initially categorize the reasons why students disliked working in groups. Instead, I read the paper and recorded any instance of an attitude toward groups. This description was written down, and a tally of the number of times different students mentioned the same behavior was kept. Unless the students' descriptions matched nearly verbatim, they were recorded differently. A complete list of the attitudes listed for dislike and like of group work appear in appendix B and Table 3, respectively.

The students wrote these papers at the beginning of the ten-week term. At some point during the term, whether they were in the public speaking option or the group problem-solving option, they were

presented with some basic ideas about how to work in a group, and were asked to participate in at least one group problem-solving interaction. After the students had participated in this group exercise, I asked for volunteers from each of the ten sections to answer a few questions about their attitudes toward groups.

Interviews. I interviewed forty-four of the students who had written papers for me at the beginning of the term. The interviews were attempted to determine if their attitudes toward group work had changed once they had received some instruction. I attempted to gain different information from the interviews than I had from the papers, not only in content but in scope. That is, if a student made a statement about why s/he disliked group work, an attempt was made not only to find out why, but to find out if the student thought there was any remedy for the situation. The following were the questions asked during the interviews:

1. Do you mind being taped?
2. Do you remember writing a paper about your attitudes toward groups? What was your basic attitude toward group work at that time (like/dislike)? What type of group were you referring to (classroom, interest, etc.)?
3. What kinds of groups do you particularly like/dislike? Why?
4. Do you go out of your way to join or avoid groups? Why? If you had a choice between an individual project or a group project, which would you choose?
5. You have received some instruction in groups this term, do you think that your attitude toward groups had changed with this instruction? If so, in what ways?
6. Would you have any suggestions for instructors to make "life in groups" more palatable (simpler--less mentally distressing)?
7. Other comments about groups?

One major drawback of this part of the study was that the students often became involved in detailed descriptions of the groups in which they had participated. Though this information was often interesting, it was not particularly relevant to the study. The recommendations that the students made about how to use groups in the classroom, however, did compensate for the largely unnecessary part of the interview, the description of specific interactions in groups.

During the interviews I attempted to find out if the student's attitude had changed toward group work in general (see Question #5). I recorded the number of students who were willing to attribute a change in attitude from negative to positive, from positive to negative, or those who had maintained a basically positive or negative attitude toward groups. This was the only information that was tallied from the interviews. It would have been redundant to record the type of groups that the students had been in, and their attitudes toward those groups, as these were students who had written papers from which that information had already been extracted.

Findings

This section will describe the results of the analysis of both the papers and interviews which were done to determine what negative attitudes toward group work students in a basic speech performance course reported.

As was described in the "Methodology" section of this paper, the first piece of information extracted from the papers written by these students was their overall reaction to group work. Again, I made no attempt to categorize a student's response if s/he did not state

specifically what his/her overall reaction was. Below is the distribution of their written responses.

Table 1

Overall Reaction to Group Work

Reaction	Number of Responses
Like	66
Dislike	73
Unable to determine	69

Total N of students surveyed = 208

Once the information about an overall reaction had been obtained, I recorded the number of different types of groups students mentioned in their papers. Because students were not restricted to talking about one group, the total number of groups mentioned exceeds the total number of students sampled. (For a list of the names of all groups mentioned, see Appendix D.)

Table 2

Total Number and Percentage of
Group Types Mentioned
(from student papers)

Category	Number of Times Mentioned	% of Total Responses
Task (classroom)	68	25
Task (other)	3	1
Interest	32	12

(continued)

(Table 2 Continued)

Category	Number of Times Mentioned	% of Total Responses
Ascribed	2	1
Therapy	0	0
Other (undesignated)	164	61
Total	269	100

Total N of Students Surveyed = 208

The category "other" simply means that the student did not state a name for the group s/he was describing. The student probably had a particular experience in mind when s/he wrote about a "group experience," but failed to describe that group in enough detail (or in any detail) so that it was possible to identify as one of the other types of group. The next most commonly referred to group was the classroom task group. (Though I had thought therapy groups might be included by students before I began to tally the data, no student mentioned this type of group--thus its inclusion in the above table.)

Once the students papers had been checked for their overall attitudes toward groups, and the types of groups they had belonged to, I compiled lists of their attitudes toward groups. The reasons students liked to work in groups are listed below, with the frequency of each response.

Table 3

Why Students Like Groups

(Taken from students' papers on their attitudes toward groups)

Behaviors	Number of Times Mentioned
"Get to know people"	59
"Sharing ideas"	59

(continued)

(Table 3 continued)

Behaviors	Number of Times Mentioned
"Work divided"	27
"Learn to work with people"	27
"Common goal"	21
"The group worked well"	21
"Leadership" (enjoy being leader)	20
"Share the responsibility for presentation"	19
"More ideas"	14
"broaden scope of a topic"	14
"Accomplish more"	14
"Respect for the others' opinions"	11
"Pride in accomplishments"	11
"Responsibility" (others expect you to do the work)	11
"Work is completed faster"	9
"Individual expertise is shared"	9
"Learn more"	7
"Leadership" (leader was good)	7
"Constructive criticism"	7
"Cohesiveness"	6
"Challenge"	5
"Gives insight into self"	4
"Group has more impact"	3
"Able to help new members"	2
"Learning at own pace"	1

Total N of students = 208

Though the reasons why students liked to work in groups did not tend to cluster around specific categories, the reasons why students disliked working in groups tended to cluster around four main categories: grading concerns, interpersonal concerns, group organizational concerns, and outcome concerns. The frequency analysis of each of these types follows.

Table 4

Grading Elements

Behavior	Number of Times Mentioned
"All received the same grade for dissimilar work"	25
"Lower grade because of group members"	9
"Graded unfairly"	1

Total N of students surveyed = 208

The grading elements were mostly concerned with students who received the same grade for dissimilar work. Interpersonal considerations (Table 5) show that an overbearing leader was the most often-mentioned reason for dislike of group work.

Table 5

Interpersonal Considerations

Behaviors	Number of Times Mentioned
"Overbearing leader"	30
"One poor (bad) group member"	24
"Arguments"	17
"Afraid to voice new opinion"	13
"Personality Conflicts"	11
"Limited self expression"	11
"Afraid to voice differing opinion"	11
"Others not willing to compromise"	11
"Must depend on strangers"	9
"Members not enthusiastic"	8
"Ideas not acted upon"	8
"Embarassed of own opinion"	7
"Others only interested in socializing"	7

(continued)

(Table 5 continued)

Behaviors	Number of Times Mentioned
"Don't like to lead"	7
"Some members don't attend meetings"	4
"Competition"	3
"Everyone talks at once"	3
"Personal judgments unfair ('sizes up' others)"	3
"Someone joined the group late"	1

Total N of students surveyed = 208

The next category concerns the output of the group, for example, a final presentation by the group. Most students were concerned that nothing would get done in their groups, followed by those concerned with the quality of the final project. Table 6 describes the frequency analysis for the outcome elements.

Table 6

Outcome Elements

Behaviors	Number of Times Mentioned
"Nothing gets done"	11
"Poor quality final project"	10
"Group slow to accomplish"	8
"Getting the project done seems hopeless"	2
"Others only want to 'get the job done'"	1

Total N of students surveyed = 208

Table 7 describes the final grouping of the reasons why students did not like to work in groups. This section refers to the group's organization, an element which students have little, or no control over.

Table 7

Group Organization

Behaviors	Number of Times Mentioned
"Assigned to group" (no choice of members)	16
"Not enought time"	14
"Topics for projects are boring"	11
"Group is too big"	9
"Forced to work in the group" (No option for individual work)	7
"Roles unlcear"	6
"Group is too small"	4
"Group think"	4
"Poor leadership" (leader was assigned)	1
"Group work too early in academic career"	1

Total N of students surveyed = 208

Once the data from the papers had been compiled, the information from the interviews was analyzed. The only material which was compiled in table form was the overall attitudes about working in groups from the beginning to the end of the term. This material appears in Table 3.

Table 8

Attitudes About Working in Groups
(Taken from interviews with students)

Attitude	Number of Students
Likes group work and always has	14
Dislikes group work and always has	16

(continued)

(Table 8 continued)

Attitude	Number of Students
Attitude changed because of class	2*
Indifferent	12

Total N of students interviewed = 44

*From negative to positive--none reported a change from positive to negative.

Only two students were willing to attribute their overall reactions having changed because of the class they had attended (Speech Communication 200). All other students were static in their feelings toward group work.

The most important information I gleaned from the interviews was the fact that those students who were indifferent or positive in their feelings toward group work did not feel as though they needed instruction in how to work in groups, but those students who disliked group work were interested in classroom instruction in how to work in a group.

Conclusions and Recommendations

The conclusions which can be drawn from this study must necessarily be in terms of classroom instruction and students in a basic speech performance course, as this was the audience who participated in the research. However, I feel that some of these conclusions can be extrapolated to other settings in which group work to accomplish a specific task is undertaken.

First, because there were so many students who did express dissatisfaction with group work, there is obviously a need to study the problem further, and to determine if there are other steps that can be taken other than those suggested by this study. With group work being used so frequently in the classroom, it seems unfair to both the students and the teachers to deny the fact that so many do not even want to participate in groups from the beginning. Further research, too, might lead to stronger conclusions, based on larger and more complete sampling of the college population.

Secondly, I believe that more than any other recommendation, these data suggest that teachers should provide instructional materials for those students who do not like to work in groups. If this material can be provided prior to the group experience, then it might be possible to provide a more enjoyable group experience for the student. Though it does not appear reasonable to suggest that students' overall attitudes will change with this instruction, at least the specific group experience can be made more enjoyable, and if the student perceives it to be more pleasant, it is entirely possible

that the group will be more effective.

Specific syllabi which recognize that some students do not like to work in groups would include group exercises which were ungraded to begin the term, in order to give those with bad group experiences a chance to work in a productive group. The teacher should also plan to teach specifically how to work in groups, with a specific procedure clearly presented for the appropriate steps to follow. Several introductory texts provide information about the standard agenda for problem-solving.

At the very least, teachers should be careful to assign only group tasks which are appropriate for a group. Too often instructors are guilty of assigning group tasks simply because no other lesson plan was prepared. Not only is this irresponsible on the part of the teacher, but it provides for the student who does not like to work in groups reinforcement of this attitude.

When considering how this information might be used outside of the classroom setting, the applications appear endless. Any business or industry which incorporates the administrative group for problem-solving could be populated with group members who do not like group work. If these persons could be identified and instructed in appropriate group methods, they might be more satisfied with the group, and produce more effective results. There, certainly, are no guarantees that the group will be more productive, but if the persons involved in the group process are more positive about their potential for productive sessions, then there is certainly the possibility for positive decisions.

Overall this study provided information about how students feel about their work in groups. Some students obviously do have a negative initial reaction to group work. It is this attitude which teachers and administrators must recognize, and attempt to remedy. Only future research will tell us which measures would be most effective, and when, indeed, we should feel obliged to interfere. Though group members who do not like the group process may impede the work at hand, this dislike does not necessarily imply that the group member does not do his/her work. We simply must determine what steps would be most effective to help people to enjoy group work more, with the assumption that more and better results will be achieved by those who enjoy their work.

Appendix A

Speech Communication 200: Option D

Option D is an emphasis of Speech Communication 200 established to assist students who have special communication needs. It is designed to work directly on specific problems in communication within academic and social settings. In Option D, students are expected to set individual goals and to accomplish communication tasks which they have heretofore been reluctant to try and unable to do. Check the following kinds of communication concerns.

1. You may have difficulty asking questions in class and participating in class discussions. You may be reluctant to strike up acquaintances with classmates.

2. You may shy away from speaking to professors after class and avoid office conferences.

3. You may feel apprehensive at employment interviews and uncertain about how to communicate on the job with your boss and fellow employees.

4. You may be uneasy about committee work and feel that you don't contribute your fair share in group problem solving discussions.

5. You may have difficulty meeting strangers and opening up new friendships. In social situations, you may find yourself a non-participant on the fringe of the group.

6. You may be unusually troubled, feel physicall ill, shake, or sweat when you have to present formal reports in public situations.

7. You may have difficulty with shyness.

If you feel any or all of these communicative concerns are yours and if you wish to work specifically on solving them, you are eligible for an interview for Option D. IF YOU ARE IN DOUBT ABOUT WHETHER OR NOT YOU HAVE SPECIAL COMMUNICATION NEEDS, COME FOR THE INTERVIEW. There is no obligation to enter Option D, it is entirely voluntary. However, <u>you cannot enroll in Option D without an interview</u>.

Interviews are confidential and will be conducted in <u>Room 225 Sparks any time between 9 a.m. - 4 p.m.</u> The interviewer will discuss your communicative needs with you, and the two of you will decide whether or not Option D can be useful to you. If you elect to enter Option D, your transfer will be automatic; you will not need to go through a drop-add procedure.

Appendix B

Why Students Dislike Working in Groups

Behaviors	Number of Times Mentioned
"Overbearing leader"	30
"All received the same grade for dissimilar work"	25
"One poor (bad) group member"	24
"Arguments"	17
"Assigned to group" (no choice of members)	16
"Not enough time"	14
"Afraid to voice new opinion"	13
"Nothing gets done"	11
"Personality conflicts"	11
"Limited self expression"	11
"Afraid to voice differing opinion"	11
"Others not willing to compromise"	11
"Topics for projects are boring"	11
"Poor quality final project"	10
"Lower grade because of group members"	9
"Must depend on strangers"	9
"Group is too big"	9
"Group slow to accomplish"	8
"Members not enthusiastic"	8
"Ideas not acted upon"	8
"Forced to work in a group" (no opition for individual work)	7
"Embarassed of own opinion"	7
"Others only interested in socializing"	7
"Don't like to lead"	7
"Roles unclear"	6
"Don't know what the other members are doing"	4
"Cliques"	4
"Some members don't attend meetings"	4
"Group is too small"	4
"Groupthink"	4
"Competition"	3
"Everyone talks at once"	3
"Personal judgments unfair" ('sized up' others)	2

(continued)

(Appendix B continued)

Behaviors	Number of Times Mentioned
"Getting the project done seems hopeless"	2
'Graded unfairly"	1
"Poor leadership" (leader was assigned)	1
"Others only want to 'get the job done'"	1
"Group work too early in academic career"	1
"someone joined the group late"	1

Total N of students surveyed = 208

Appendix C

Names of Groups

1. Group project (graded)
2. Group project (ungraded)
3. Fraternity
4. Sorority
5. Academic club (honorary)
6. Sports team
7. Residence hall organization
8. Military
9. Parties
10. Political groups
11. Groups with people you know (friends)
12. Groups with people you don't know
13. Musical groups
14. Religious groups
15. School clubs
16. Other (reference to a "group", but no name)
17. Dramatics
18. Family
19. Community project
20. Scouts
21. Debate

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